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ABSTRACT

Reporting on a public relations course at Indiana State University, this paper presents specific guidelines for students to use in converting the classroom theory of creative problem solving, persuasion, promotion, publicity, and management into the actual staging of a special event and/or fund raising. The paper offers suggestions in the areas of (1) objectives of class; (2) team project goal; (3) professional guidelines; (4) evaluation; (5) organizational process; (6) standards for ethical conduct; (7) steps of dismissal; (8) management team biography; (9) mission statement; (10) background and research; (11) situation analysis; (12) planning and programming; (13) public relations; (14) strategy of execution; (15) communication strategies; (16) interpersonal speech; and (17) progress reports. The paper concludes that these kinds of working experiences make students a stronger match in the job market; allow students a dry run for creative problem solving, research, program planning, and executing strategies for a special event; give students a chance to feel how it is in the competitive ring; and enable students to become acquainted with the executives in charitable organizations who have an inseparable alignment with public relations. Twenty references are appended. (MS)

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THE FIELD EXPERIENCE:

THE UNIQUE ASPECT OF A PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM

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The Field Experience:

The Unique Aspect of a Public Relations Program

> Down there in the competitive ring, things seldom look as panoramically clear as up in the stands where the observers sit in detached comfort. . . . Nothing is as bracing or as certain as what is directly experienced. . . . The people of affairs, the practitioners out there who fight the bull, have fundamental wisdom. . . . Only they know how it feels . . . down there on the turf (Levitt, 1983, 19).

For the past six years while teaching on the campus of the University of Madrid, I have had the opportunity to observe many bullfights from the stands. Having usually had a seat quite far back, I have often wondered what it would be like to be at the edge of the ring.

Understandably, the students in our classes are continually seeking a way to attain that competitive edge to enter the marketing arena; this is the primary reason they are sitting in the classroom. Theodore Levitt, Harvard's renowned marketing expert admits that the success formulas that students receive to attain a place in the sun are quite contradictory. Not surprisingly, professors who barter in concepts and theories design a paradigm for getting there, while practitioners who are paid to be there, inform them how they did it (Levitt, 1983).

Despite this, students tend to agree that they need both the theory of the different routes of getting there and the experience of how it feels to be there. At Indiana State our Persuasion, Promotion and Publicity class gives practice in both problem solving in the stand and creative problem solving in the competitive ring.

From my perceptual view, one of the most valuable aspects of being in the ring where successful results are on the line is the opportunity for creative problem solving. Currently, many Fortune 500 companies are sharing company profits with their employees to encourage creativity and innovativeness. They call it participatory management (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Furthermore, "creative people are placed in a position of power to . . . experiment with new, more humanly responsive work practices" (Kanter, 1983, p. 10). Moreover, companies like Calvin Klein, Westinghouse, and Ford Motor are training employees to think creatively (Lindsey, 1986). For over a decade, 3M personnel have trafficked in creative thinking with the ingrained motto, "Never kill an idea" (Corbett, 1986). More than ever before, it appears that students could benefit from this type of experience.

A second aspect to experience is the planning stage. To have the feel of in-depth planning from the first day of determining the objectives to the final day of countdown for a special event or fund raising, can be almost as exciting as being at the edge of the ring. The planning stage extends to managing and preparing the budget, to the careful use of client funds, and to the responsibility for public funds.

A third element of trial and testing that can either end in a friendship or a crisis of severed relationships is the working together as a management team. This concept is being demonstrated in the new participatory management style of corporations emphasizing employee teamwork commitment (Kanter, 1983, Drucker, 1985, Argyris, 1982, Hertzberg, 1962). On the other hand, this team culture shows positive energy as John Brodie, former quarterback of the San Francisco Forty-Niners football team recalls:

> When you have 11 men who . . . have every ounce of their attention--and--intention--focused on a common goal, and all their energy flowing in the same direction, this creates a very special concentration of power (Beck, Hillmar, 1984, p. 22).

This phenomenon of positive energy has been revealed many times to both the client and me. Not long ago, I had a management team working with the downtown council on a special event with the theme, "A Christmas to Remember--Downtown." Since the event was scheduled on the day after Thanksgiving, the parents of the students came to the campus to celebrate Thanksgiving and stay for the event. The students planned the time line and chose to stay on campus the day before their event. There are other occasions when parents have driven from four to six hours for the celebration of special events of their children.

On the other hand, we have team members afflicted with spectatoritis as they watch others do the work. This year I have incorporated a format for firing or terminating a nonproductive or unethical team manager. This act, too, coincides with occurrences in the competitive ring of the real world and is indeed significant to modern times (Pascarella, 1986, July 7). One of our clients, Big Brother, Big Sister, took this action long before the policy was in our syllabus. The executive director fired a member of the management team for the offense of being dictatorial and talking back to him. However, this action was a growth experience for the remaining team members who continued to fulfill their objectives to the agency's satisfaction. We still retain an open, working relationship with the organization.

Indeed, this growth experience brings us to the fourth point of results and evaluation. Accountability in the ring involves stamina in moving from

the status of an amateur to a person of experience. Unfortunately, students never find it very comfortable down there, and the instructor finds it even less comfortable in supervising them. As one bullfighter said, "To fight a bull when you are not scared is nothing. But to fight a bull when you are scared--that is something."

Special events have proliferated in corporations to the point that Advertising Age is publishing a newsletter twice a month specifically to report them (Canton, 1984). It is rare to find a corporation that is not donating time, money, or both to a nonprofit organization. This not only fulfills the company's obligation to the community, but also enhances its image, visibility and bottom line. At the same time, charitable participation and fund raising is an integral part of the public relations mix.

The purpose of this paper is to present specific guidelines for students to use in converting the classroom theory of creative problem solving, persuasion, promotion, publicity and management into the actual staging of a special event and/or fund raising. Students must be in touch with the real world to understand the overall managerial science of public relations. On the one hand, I have found that students who have studied the public relations process still need a pattern to follow as they are working through this process. On the other hand, the senior marketing and communication students in the class, who have never studied the process, need the information in both lecture and written form.

Guidelines

"In your work and in your research, there must always be passion," says Ivan Petrovich Pavlov in his Bequest to the Academic Youth of Soviet Russia. This theory is still applicable for researching publics and planning a fund raising and/or special event.

Objectives of Class

To think creatively

To work in the capacity of an informal internship.

To learn that with opportunity comes ethical responsibility in upholding the image, reputation and policies of the client.

To develop analytical skills in an entrepreneurial decision making and problem solving role.

To experience working with a management team that fosters commitment, responsibility and accountability.

To position Indiana State University as a responsible communicator/contributor to the Terre Haute community's economy and quality of life.

Team Project Goal

To research, design, plan and manage the execution of a promotional/fund raising event of professional quality for an off-campus client.

Professional Guidelines

Before we employ a person to fill a position on a team, in a department or in a company, we want to know if that person shares our work ethics, our goal ideals and has the necessary work experience. Will this person fit the image and group culture of our organization? Will this person be committed to achieving the group goal? Will this person be a desirable team manager/leader?

Time Line

Interview: Why you should want to employ me? Sell yourself to the class as you intend to sell yourself to an employer. Report on your education, your

work experience in event planning, sales, fund raising, media relations, marketing, writing, management, and leadership. Remember, any work experience is valuable. (The vice-president of Anheuser-Busch had his experience as a paperboy listed on his resume.) HIGHLIGHT YOUR STRENGTHS and (for class purposes) SHARE YOUR WEAKNESSES. Minimum: three minutes Maximum: four minutes

Class members are future employers. Take notes on the speakers. It will help you select an effective group manager, tracker, or spokesperson on your specific team.

Time Line

List first, second and third choice of a nonprofit organization. Prepare a one-page proposal for your first choice covering the following:

Creative theme and logo
Objectives (realistically, what do you plan to do)
Strategies (how will you do it)
Evaluation (how will you measure results)

Your interview speech and your one-page proposal will be an important factor in your team placement. It will assist us in attaining the proper balance of skills on each management team. All positions hold equal management status. However, the two important positions for facilitating cohesiveness are those of the group manager and the tracker.

Organizational Process

Group Manager: As a team, you may want to remain leaderless until a group manager emerges or until you know each other well enough to select one with the qualities that will be operational for the team.

Time Line: At first meeting

Tracker: Select a very precise, organized, attention-to-detail person. The tracker should have perfectionist qualities. Keeps track of verbal communication. Listens for creative ideas.

Duties: Keeps track of beginning brainstorming ideas.

Keeps a large master flow-chart calendar working backward from the day of the event to the beginning of Day 1 and the planning stage. This arrangement will give a picture of the critical dates that the execution of objectives must be met.

Keeps a weekly information schedule with team member names and duties; this weekly calendar correlates with the large working calendar marking off completed strategy deadlines.

Keeps a "To Do List" stating tasks/by whom, and by what date. Keeps track of all copy; e.g., news releases, letters, PSAs, posters, flyers, brochures, etc.

Keeps track of PERT Chart and shows execution of strategies to meet objectives.

Shares with instructor at weekly meetings.

Group Manager: Job description designed by management team.

Spokesperson: Be selective in choosing the spokesperson for your client and the media. He/she should have the attributes of a professional.

Time Line

Creating Standards For Ethical Conduct

"Don't live with a problem--face it honestly and correct it." Excuses interest no one except our competition. Never tolerate commitments in words instead of in spirit." Hewlett-Packard Group Manager

Team policies should be created by each manager and presented in one of the initial group meetings for compiling into group rules. Since all managers have an equal voice in the rule design, it will prevent misunderstandings. Policies should cover professionalism, dress code, responsibility, accountability for business conduct, tardiness, unexcused absences, deadlines, complaint processing, and the right to fire a person for cause (Whitlow, 1983). In the last few years, firing or downsizing has become as prevalent as the hiring process. It would be unrealistic to tolerate underperformance in your organization while "hundreds--even tens of thousands" (Pascarella, July 7, 1986) have been discharged because of the changing technological environment. Unfortunately, this process causes the target person, the team and the client to lose face, but it may be critical to morale and to the effectiveness of achieving the group goal.

State steps of dismissal

1. A letter of notification should be sent to the team manager and the instructor.
2. State time period that will be allowed to correct the deficiency.
3. After the time period (week or two) to correct the deficiency, the team should vote to reinstate or terminate.
4. A copy of the reinstatement or termination letter must be sent to the team manager and the instructor.

Management Team Biography

Each team manager should prepare a biographical sketch relating his/her experience, major, special skills, and the specific team assignment. This statement of team qualifications will create a definite image for the client and will give him/her a picture of the training and expertise of each person involved in the project.

Mission Statement Time Line _____

Write a mission statement for your team which will signify your image to yourself, your client, and to all those who know you. IBM's mission statement is: "Customer service, excellence, and respect for the individual." The mission statement projects these points:

1. It is your team's generalized end; your commitment and support.
2. It is your business mission.
3. It expresses emotional appeal through your core values and beliefs.
4. It expresses trends, vision, strengths and resources.
5. It distinguishes you from others in the same business.

Background and Research

The first step in any public relations planning is to know as much about your client as possible.

Research the following:

1. Library research on the national organization or business
2. Relevant history and evolution of the client organization
3. Periodical articles published in the last five years
4. Printed information from the client on the specific environment in which it operates

5. Important management policy issues (moral, legal and ethical standards)
6. Client interview for questions and a feel for the specific need/problem focus of the organization
7. Opinion leaders: Ask for names of influential leaders (board members) who may advise you in making successful business contacts.
8. Portfolios of former management teams

Situation Analysis Time Line_____

Write a paragraph on the assembled and analyzed problem/opportunity situation; i.e., the background of your client, problems, issues, why you were offered the opportunity, the agency offering the opportunity, the task assigned, the target publics involved, and the opportunities with the media. This analysis should end with a clear, concise, measurable problem statement sentence.

Planning and Programming Time Line_____

Program Goal: What is your overall program goal in treating the problem? For instance, if Indiana State wants to monitor its present image in the eyes of its many publics, your overall program goal could be to attain this image profile by surveying its key publics. Goals are broad and seemingly abstract (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) A goal compares to a basic sense of direction leading to a certain destination.

Campaign Goal: Look at your problem statement and design your overall program goal to correct this problem. State the program goal and ask questions in terms of each unique public involved.

Your Publics

"Project yourself into the minds of people you are trying to reach, and see things the way they do" (Ballard, 1948). This idea was posited by early

public relations advisors and teachers and the advice is still relevant in interpersonal relationships.

Who is involved and affected by the overall program goal?

Who are the most important publics?

What are demographic, psychographic, and life style characteristics?

What motivates them, what is their favorite thing to do, what wavelink do they follow?

Who are their opinion leaders?

Interview with any public you will be involved with. You must understand their thinking in order to design specific objectives for them. Your immediate task will be to project credibility and trust in order to gain the sentiment of each. The immediate perception that they have of you and of your program will be a factor in your fund-raising success. Designing specific objectives for each key public will contribute to the success of the whole.

Objectives: "This is what our team is going to do!"

Objectives are specific, measurable components (maps) that must be followed to reach your visionary goal.

Manpower, Mind-power and Money (Koestler, 1977) determine the choice and number of objectives that you should undertake.

Objectives are realistic and attainable.

They are the foundation for your goal. Someday your job may depend on the fulfillment of your objectives. Your campaign evaluation will be made on the attainment of your proposed objectives. Your client has contracted with you for the fulfillment of these specific obligations.

Time Line

State objectives clearly and concisely in the infinitive tense; e.g., "to raise $1,500, to air 20 PSA's or to generate 7 publicity articles.

Each manager on the team can decide his area of expertise--management by objectives (MBO) in results expected (Duncan, 1978). Following Drucker's instructional philosophy of MBO, each manager on the team must set his/her own objectives in order to have control and responsibility for a specialized area of work (Drucker, 1977).

Strategy of Execution: "This is how and when we will do it."

First: Research an open date. Don't compete in time. Find a place where people will want to come.

Strategies are the day-to-day tactical plans of operations indicating how you will accomplish each task and the proposed completion date. This is the mind work and leg work of achieving proposed objectives. Ten or more stated tasks may be needed to fulfill one objective. Develop strategies for each key public with a description of each approach. Arthur Wilson Page, an early pioneer practitioner, notes that, "Public Relations is 90 percent doing and 10 percent talking about it." (Seitel, 1987, p. 54).

Communication Strategies

Message: Develop a creative theme and logo.

I was always told to check the theme by asking:

Does it break through?

Does it ring true?

Does it make people like you?

Publicity: State the print, television and radio media that you plan to use and the number of publicity items that you plan to generate. Seek advice from the media; if possible, let them be a part of your event.

Action: Proposed activities to meet objectives

Time Line: For the execution of each strategy

Budget: Client should be asked about out-of-pocket expenses. Prepare a detailed, itemized budget

Don't forget to state the rationale for your strategies. Build in flexibility if you find that an objective is impossible to meet. One missed deadline can ruin an entire campaign.

Interpersonal Speech

Remember, people like things that solve their problems. What are the needs and desires of this specific public? The interpersonal speech should be tailor-made for each public.

I. Plan

A. Know what your client does to help the community (people are interested in their city).

B. Know as much as you can about the potential contribution.

C. Choose the best time to talk to the potential contributor.

II. Why should the potential contributor give? People do things for their reasons--not ours. What will giving do for them?

A. Start the interaction by saying something that the target person might want to hear.

B. Explain the purpose of your visit.

C. Make positive points about why you are a volunteer for your client.

D. Use a campaign brochure or other agency materials to explain what your client does for the community.

III. Answer questions and concerns

A. Ask for the donation (remember, they are interested if their associates have contributed).

B. Write down the most common objection and/or difficulty in the interaction so you will be able to adjust for the next potential contributor.

IV. Say "Thank You"

A. Thank each person for his/her time even if they did not give. Give equal recognition to all.

B. You are the image of your client.

Progress Reports Time Line _____ weekly _____

Develop a Program Evaluation Review Technique (PERT) Chart in your weekly meetings to visually chart your course. The PERT Chart is a systems concept that was created by the Navy to aid in planning a project and evaluating its progress. Utilize a PERT network to emphasize to each team manager that his/her ability to complete a task is critical to the success of the entire team project (Longenecker & Pringle, 1981).

Tracker of each team provides the instructor with a PERT schedule of tasks to be accomplished each week.

Each team manager turns in a 3 by 5 card of his/her completed tasks weekly.

Positive Publicity

Creativity and Originality Will Alert Your Publics.

Your proposal should include the following: Time Line_____

A. Slogan that is right for the public. It may be one that they have identified with in the past.

B. PRESS COVERAGE: An excellent tracking device for measuring results

a. Each team is required to have one brochure or flyer for advertising purposes.

b. Proposed PSAs for radio/TV

c. Press releases; keep them short and creative

d. Photography

e. Newspaper ads, posters, billboards (concise wording)

f. features

C. Know your media. Read the newspaper and check similar types of ads and features that you will be proposing.

D. Listen to the PSAs on stations in order to know each station's style.

E. Do you have any media contacts?

Count-Down on the day of the Event

1. Have a dry-run rehearsal the night before the event.

2. List every step of each activity in an activity log carried by all members. Each manager's name should top one section with his location and time designated. This gives team security and cohesiveness in continually being in touch.

3. Don't over plan verbally; organizational strategy must be written.

4. Make contingent plans. Who will pick up the ball if someone drops it?

5. Strive for controllable variables.

Evaluation

Tracking your results begins with the initial objectives and meeting of deadlines.

1. Evaluation strategy for each of your programs

a. What will be measured?

b. How will it be measured?

c. When will it be measured?

2. Publicity

   a. number of press releases

   b. number of radio spots

   c. number of participating companies

   d. final report to media

3. Follow-up with thank you letters to donors, sponsors and volunteers

Post Mortem

"The operation was a success, but the patient died." Education does not provide all of the answers.

1. The issue is, "Why your event succeeded or failed."
2. Expose the shortcomings of your campaign and point out what should be changed.
3. Identify the successful times that you were on target in working through the public relations process.

Conclusion

This paper presented the guidelines for public relations students to convert theoretical classroom words into practical application. Working experience not only makes the student a stronger match in the job market, but it also allows a dry run for creative problem solving, research, program planning and executing strategies for a special event. Indeed, working with community clients gives students a chance to feel how it is in the competitive ring. At the same time, they become acquainted with the executives in charitable organizations who have an inseparable alignment with public relations.

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